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O. W. Mitchell

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WHY WILL YE DIE?

AN

EXPOSTULATION WITH SELF-DESTROYERS.

BY THE
REV. WILLIAM J. McCORD.

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PREFACE.

INTO whose hands shall this book fall? In God's good providence, reader, it has fallen into yours. Will you give it a candid perusal, and see whether it may not contain a message for you?

You may feel no concern about your soul; then you are in the way to death, and why will you die? In this little book the great God, Jehovah, your Maker speaks to you, and says, Turn and live!

It may be, you are asking what you must do to be saved. Here you may get an answer to that question; for while Jehovah, expostulates, and asks, WHY WILL YE DIE? He also says, TURN AND LIVE! And in this

book Jesus Christ is presented to you as THE FRIEND OF SINNERS. Let me beseech you, then, to read, and to ponder well the message which is here brought to you. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life. Deut. xxxiv. 47.

W. J. M.

JEFFERSON, N. Y., DEC. 1, 1853.

WHY WILL YE DIE?

For why will ye die, O house of Israel ?—Ezek. xviii. 31.

CHAPTER I.

WHY WILL YE DIE?

Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly. Psa. cxxxviii. 6: He looks to them who are poor and of a contrite spirit, and that tremble at his word. Isa. lvii. 15; lxi. 1; lxvi. 2. He regards his people as the apple of his eye. Deut. xxxii. 10; Zech. ii. 8. Nor does he disregard those who are yet in their sins. He delights not in their death; but grants them space for repentance, and gives them many invitations to return to him and become reconciled. Ez. xxxiii. 11. Nor is this all. He condescends to reason with them, that they may be convinced of

their danger and flee to the refuge provided, saying, Come, and let us reason together. Isa. i. 18. He deals in kind and tender expostulations: How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? Hos. xi. 8. And when every argument is exhausted, he still follows them with entreaties, saying, Why will ye die? Ez. xviii. 31.

Few passages in the word of God are more earnest and tender than this:—Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: FOR WHY WILL YE DIE, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. Ez. xviii. 30–32.

A question is here proposed which should come home to the heart of every reader, *Why will ye die?*

Consider the death referred to. What death is it?

Not temporal death. There could be no

propriety in asking this question in regard to the death of the body, for all must die. It is not left to any one's choice whether he *will* die or not. The decree has gone forth, and it is universal, Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. Gen. iii. 19. The rich and the poor, the great and the small, the high and the low, all, all must die and lie down in the grave—all must pass through the struggles of death, and yield up their spirits unto God who gave them. All must die. Should we propose the question to our readers in this view—Why will ye die? they might answer, "It is not left optional with us; we are mortal because we are sinful; disease and death are our lot; the seeds of decay are sown in our systems, and sooner or later we must reap the fruit, and return to our native earth." It is not temporal death, then, to which the question refers. Whether you will or not, reader, this death you must die!

Nor is it spiritual death. This, too, is universal. It is the natural state of man. It is the native condition of all men; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh. John iii. 6.

And you hath he quickened, saith an apostle, who were *dead* in trespasses and sins,—by *nature* the children of wrath, even as others. Eph. ii. 1–3. Spiritual death is sin; it separates the soul from God, so that it has no communion with him, no spiritual enjoyment, no life; it is dead to peace, to happiness, and to hope; dead to God and holiness. And as all men sinned in Adam and fell with him, and hence are born under the curse; and as all men have sinned by their own act too; so all are spiritually dead—dead in sin. If in this view we put the question, Why will ye die? the reply might be,—"We are dead already! We were born under the curse; we have been under it ever since we had an existence; we are under it still—dead in trespasses and sins!"—Yes, reader, you are dead! All your life you have been dead! And it is not in regard to spiritual death that I ask, *Why wilt thou die?* You are dead already! But another question may be put, Why continue in this state? Why have it perpetuated? Why continue *dead*, when there is One who can quicken and give life? This is substanti-

ally the question proposed when it is asked, Why will ye die? for if men are not delivered from spiritual death, it will end in eternal death.

Eternal death! This is the death specially referred to when it is asked, Why will ye die? It is eternal death, called in another place, the second death, which is the same as being cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. Rev. xx. 14; xxi. 8; the wages of sin is death:—the same as everlasting punishment, for of the wicked Jesus Christ declares, These shall go away into everlasting punishment. Rom. vi. 23; Matt. xxv. 46. It is also written, The soul that sinneth, it shall die; and this death is the same as the penalty of God's law, for it is written again, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. Ez. xviii. 4–20; Gal. iii. 10. To be cursed of God, is to be miserable for ever, for he is the only source of happiness. The DEATH to which the sinner is exposed is just the reverse of that LIFE which is the inheritance of the righteous. Matt. xxv. 46. That

life is ETERNAL; for the gift of God is *eternal life*, and he that believeth on the Son hath *everlasting life*. This DEATH, then, must also be *eternal;* for he that believeth not the Son shall *not see life*, but the wrath of God *abideth on him*—abideth for ever! Rom. vi. 23; John iii. 36. The abiding wrath of God is eternal death!

ETERNAL DEATH! This death is not annihilation. There is no such word in the Christian vocabulary; there is no such thing in the universe of God. Annihilation! It is an idle dream, as vain as it is visionary! The wicked in the future world may wish for annihilation, but it can never be. They must exist for ever. God who gave them existence at the first, can sustain them in existence; and he will, that he may manifest the severity of his justice for their abuse of his goodness! Reader, you are IMMORTAL; you must *live for ever*, even though you die the second death!

ETERNAL DEATH! This death is not a limited punishment beyond the grave. We have already seen that it is *eternal*—everlasting punishment. Matt. xxv. 46. There is no

such thing as a limited punishment hereafter. The only punishment of which the Bible speaks is *without end*, described by the Saviour in these awful words, Where their worm *dieth not*, and the fire is *not quenched*—NOT QUENCHED—Then it must burn for ever! Mark ix. 44.

Eternal death! It is death to happiness. It cuts off all those sources of pleasure which this world furnishes, and excludes from heaven, from the blessedness for which the soul was made, from the enjoyment of God in which the angels and the redeemed from among men delight, from the blessed inheritance above. Constituted as is the soul of man, the deprivation of happiness is misery; but they who die the second death, have no happiness; to every kind and degree of enjoyment they are *dead;* how miserable then must they be! Banished from God, the source of joy, there remains for them nought but an accumulation of sorrow and anguish. Eternal death is death to happiness.

It is also death to hope. In this world men are prisoners of hope; in the next, if

they die in their sins, prisoners of despair. Zech. ix. 12. While they live they are not without hope, that they shall become prepared for death ere it arrive. They cherish the expectation that they shall be ready, or at least so far prepared that they shall escape the miseries of the lost, and heaven be their eternal dwelling-place. But when once this mortal scene is closed, these hopes will all be fled. The time of preparation will then be gone, and with it all hope of obtaining the divine favour. Nor will there be any hope of escape from the place of woe. They may anxiously desire deliverance; they may look around for a way of escape; but it is in vain. In this world, how miserable soever we may be, there still is hope that it may one day be better with us. But in that world of sorrow all hope expires! They who die the second death, are *dead to hope;* there can be no hope of mercy—no hope of escape from their sufferings—no hope that it will ever be better with them than it is! Dead to hope, they are the victims of DESPAIR!

Eternal death is eternal misery. Not only

will all hope and happiness be fled—not only will conscience reprove and torment—not only will there be remorse and despair—not only will the lost increase each other's woe and be tormented by evil spirits;—but there will also be, as a manifestation of the divine displeasure against sin, the direct infliction of misery. What that misery will be, it is not needful to enquire. It will be proportioned to their crimes, and greater than we can now form any conception of. All the senses will be avenues of pain, and all the powers of the soul will serve to augment the wretchedness of the miserable. No tongue can tell their anguish! And after suffering ten thousand ages, there will still be an eternity of woe to be endured! After being in the agonies of death for myriads of centuries, there still is *eternal dying* to torture and agonize the soul! Eternal death is eternal dying—eternal anguish—remorse and despair commingled with the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God! *This is eternal death!*

THE DEATH, then, is something fearful and awful; it is something which no one can love,

no one desire; something which should be dreaded and shunned by all. Hence the question has force and meaning, Why will ye die? Why persevere in that course which must end in eternal death? Why choose a part which must exclude you from heaven and consign you to endless despair? Reader, *why wilt* THOU *die?*

It is not because there is no way of escape from this death that men die. There is a way of escape; it is not of necessity, but of choice—they *will* die; they choose death rather than life!

For provision is made. Jesus Christ took our place, and by dying in our stead he opened the door of hope to the world. Gal. iv. 4–6. He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. Rom. iv. 25. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isa. liii. 4–6. He is the Prince of life; yet he died that he might redeem us from death.

In him is life; and they who believe in him shall never die. Acts iii. 14, 15; John xi. 25, 26. Having endured the penalty of the law for us—in our room and stead—we, by believing in him, may be delivered from that penalty and have a title to everlasting life; for he has been made a curse for us, and he is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Rom. v. 6–10; viii. 1–4; x. 4; Gal. iii. 13, 24. He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him; and he that cometh shall in no wise be cast out. Heb. vii. 25; John vi. 37. He is the way, the truth and the life; and all who come unto the Father by him shall meet with a gracious reception. John xiv. 6, Luke xv. 11–24. The fountain which he hath opened for sin and for uncleanness, can make the foulest clean; for his blood cleanseth from all sin. Zech. xiii. 1; 1 John i. 7. The redemption price is paid; the marriage supper is ready. 1 Pet. i. 18–21; Matt. xxii. 1–10.

And men are invited to partake of the provision which is made; they are invited to

come to Christ that they may have life. Many and precious are the invitations given in the gospel to perishing men. Come unto me, and I will give you rest, says the Divine Redeemer. Matt. xi. 28–30. If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. John vii. 37. Look unto me, and be ye saved. Isa. xlv. 22. Nor are invitations all that the gospel contains: there are also expostulations and entreaties. The sinner is followed with warnings and solicitations; a voice from the word is ever sounding in his ears, inviting to the cross, and saying, This is the way, walk in it and live; and when he turns from the strait and narrow way and presses on in the broad way to death, the voice of Jehovah comes, in melting tenderness, and earnest entreaty, and anxious expostulation, *Why wilt thou die?* Why ruin thy soul? Why destroy thyself? Isa. xxx. 21. How often has the reader heard that voice! And to-day you hear it again! God speaks to you in these lines, pointing you to the cross, and saying, Why wilt thou die?

Besides, the Spirit is sent to convince men

of their guilt and danger, and lead them to accept the mercy offered in the gospel. It is his office-work to renew the heart, and to convince of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. John xvi. 7–11. God gives his Spirit thus to convince men that they may be persuaded to flee from the wrath to come, return unto him, and become reconciled through Jesus Christ. How often, reader, has God by his Spirit spoken to you! And even now are you not conscious of an effort to resist his influences and silence the voice of conscience and of God, as that voice speaks in the truths you read? O self-destroyer, why thus deaf to the expostulations of Jehovah? Why refuse to listen when he says to you again, as often before, *Why wilt thou die?* Sinner, why?

Every thing is ready. The price is paid; all heaven is solicitous for man. God has done all that can be asked or reasonably expected; and the reason why men will die is not because of any thing on his part which renders it necessary. The way of escape is open; his decrees hinder not the salvation of

any. Christ has died; the way of life is pointed out; men may enter it, if they will; but they refuse, and the question returns, *Why will ye die?*

And the question implies the voluntariness of this death. It is not something which may not be avoided, but something which is chosen. Not that men understandingly and deliberately choose eternal death; but they voluntarily walk in that way which leads to it, and so indirectly choose the thing itself.—Look at the question; every word is emphatic:—Why will ye *die?* DIE—perish—suffer for ever—a dreadful end—eternal misery—who would choose it? Who would not shun it? Then, why will *ye* die? Reader, it is a matter in which *you* are interested—Jehovah is expostulating with you—you are among the self-destroyers—among those who are on the way to perdition—going down to undying death!

"In that lone land of deep despair,
No Sabbath's heavenly light shall rise;
No God regard your bitter prayer,
Nor Saviour call you to the skies!"

And, reader, are you hastening to that miserable abode? Why, O why *will* ye die? why destroy yourself? Provision is made for your deliverance; life eternal has been purchased with the precious blood of Christ; it is offered to you freely; it is urged upon you—without money and without price, Isa. lv. 1–3; then, *why* will ye die? What is the reason? Why choose death when both life and death are placed before you?

Why? Because you love your sins: you are attached to your ways of transgression. You love to gratify the evil propensities of your nature; you love to indulge the native promptings of your heart. Sin for its own sake you may not love; but for the sake of the gratification they afford you, you love your sins, you delight in them; and therefore you WILL DIE!

And you hate holiness! Your hatred of holiness is just as strong as your love of sin. You do not like to deny yourself, and practise that purity of heart and life which the Bible enjoins. God is holy; and they who would hope for heaven must be holy, but this

is contrary to your nature, which is corrupt. Heb. xii. 14; 1 Cor. ii. 14; Gal. v. 17–21. The carnal mind is enmity against God; it loves not his character, it loves not his law, nor his gospel; it is opposed to his requirements—it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Rom. viii. 5–8. You have a carnal mind—an unrenewed heart—you hate holiness; and therefore you WILL DIE!

And you dislike the plan of salvation! It is too humbling. It makes not sufficient account of human merit. It dispenses too entirely with works. It requires only faith. Rom. iii. 9–31. You want to purchase heaven with your good deeds. You want to pay your way through to the celestial city. You want to be indebted to no one but yourself for salvation. To renounce self and trust solely in Christ for eternal life is what you cannot endure; you cannot consent to receive heaven as a gift; you dislike the plan of salvation, and therefore you WILL DIE!

And you have no inclination to choose life! The choice must be made, freely made, or you

cannot be saved. But how can you make that choice, when you love sin, hate holiness, and dislike the plan of salvation? Especially, how can you make the choice, when you have *no inclination* to do so, and while a *corrupt heart enslaves your will?* The want of inclination is no excuse; it affords no apology; it is sin; it increases guilt; it exposes to the wrath of God; yet you are disinclined to the duty and altogether averse from it. Life itself you would like; the impending death you would shun; but when the way of life is made known, and you are taught that it lies by the cross of Christ, you shrink from it; you have no inclination to choose it, and therefore you WILL DIE!

And yet God the Father asks you why? Your Maker feels for you; he delights not in your death; he desires that you may live; he expostulates with you, and asks, *Why wilt thou die?*

And God the Son asks you why? He bled for you; he agonized in the garden for you; on the cross he hung, and there he died for you! He feels a deep interest in your

welfare; he could weep for you as he did over Jerusalem, Luke xiii. 34, 35, and xix. 41. He points you to the cross and to the crown, to heaven and to hell, and asks, *Why wilt thou die?*

And God the Spirit asks you why? If he felt no interest in your welfare, he would not strive with your heart and labour to bring you to embrace the hope of salvation. He manifests his interest in setting your sins in order before you, and in accompanying the truth to your heart. Even now he is moving upon your soul. He would draw you to Christ; he would lead you to the skies; and the language of all his impressions and of all his strivings is, *Why wilt thou die?*

This is also the language of God's providence! Every passing event has a voice which speaks, warning of danger, and admonishing to be ready for the coming of the Son of man. How many warnings of this kind have you had! And how many of them have been unheeded! Still God teaches and expostulates by his providence, and its language is, *Why wilt thou die?*

This is also the language of conscience! How often does conscience reprove and admonish! Amid the cares and bustle of life its voice may be unheard and unheeded; but in the hour of solitude and of sorrow, it will speak out, and it will be heard! No one is a stranger to its voice. Reader, you have heard it often, sometimes gently whispering, and then again loudly reproving, or earnestly expostulating. Yes, and conscience speaks now; it seconds the word of truth which you read; it condemns for neglected duty; it urges obedience to the calls of God; it gives forebodings of coming wrath; directs the mind to the retributions of eternity; turns the attention to the death that never dies; points to the undying worm and the quenchless fire; and asks, in thunder tones, WHY WILT THOU DIE?

There is no universalism in the Bible! Were universalism true, what sense in the question, Why will ye die? What meaning could be attached to it? It is utterly destitute of force and of sense. But it is not without meaning. It means much. It speaks

of a death which may be shunned, and that is not *temporal* death, nor *spiritual* death, but *eternal* death. This is the language of the Bible: and it cuts off the hope of those who flatter themselves that they shall not *die*, live as they may. Their dreams of safety and impunity are vain; their foot shall slide in due time! Deut. xxxii. 35. Let no one build upon this foundation, for it is to build upon the sand and secure a certain and fatal overthrow. Reader, heaven and hell are realties; and if you do not turn from your evil ways, you shall die!

Ye must be born again, said Jesus to Nicodemus. John iii. 1–8. In this expostulation of Jehovah with the self-destroyers, we see the necessity of regeneration to liberate the will, set it free from the bondage of corruption, and incline it to the choice of life. Beware, then, how you resist the Spirit of grace! He will not always strive. Grieve him away, and your are lost!

How bitter the reflections of the lost in the world of woe! They perish, not because abundant provision has not been made for the

pardon of sin; nor because salvation is not offered them; nor because the Spirit does not strive with their hearts; but because they will not come to Christ, that they might have life. John v. 40. They *die*, not because *life* is beyond their reach, but because they will die! This they must know; this they must feel; and upon this they must reflect for ever! And when they look back on the past; when they recall the scenes through which they pressed down to death, their reflections must be bitter indeed. And these bitter reflections, attended as they must be by the reproaches of conscience, will form an important part of that misery to which they are doomed through eternal ages. Reader, do you covet *that misery?* Shall those *bitter reflections* be yours?

Reader, let the question come home to your heart, *Why wilt thou die?* If but the body were diseased and in danger of death, would you not apply to some skilful hand for relief? But what is the body to the soul? The soul is in danger of death; yea, the whole man is in danger of eternal dying; a kind Phy-

sician is near; he can heal; he can give life; he can save from death; and will you not apply to him? He waits for your call; nay he calls you to him; he is ready to relieve—waiting to be gracious—will you not go to him? Pause and think! Your end is near; eternal death is before you; listen to the expostulations of Jehovah! The Father calls; the Saviour invites; the Spirit strives; O turn and live, for WHY WILT THOU DIE?

"Turn to Christ your longing eyes,
View his bleeding sacrifice,
See in him your sins forgiven,
Pardon, holiness, and heaven;
Glorify the King of Kings,
Take the peace the gospel brings."

CHAPTER II.

TURN AND LIVE.

Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.—Ezek. xviii. 82.

God is holy. He hates sin, and has declared his purpose to punish it. The immutability of his nature secures the execution of this purpose. What he has purposed, and what he has said, that he will do. The wicked must feel his wrath; they must experience the awful inflictions of his justice. But does God delight in the sufferings of the guilty? Does he inflict misery because he delights in it? Is the punishment of the wicked the sportings of the Infinite with the anguish of his creatures, like the sorrows caused by the madman who casteth firebrands, arrows and death, and saith, Am not I in sport? Prov. xxvi. 18–19.

No, indeed; the wrath of God is not a malevolent principle which rejoices in the misery it inflicts; it is the repugnance of his nature to that which is wrong, and the punishment of the wicked is but the expression of this repugnance. Sin *deserves* punishment, and as God is *holy and just*, he must punish sinners. He has in view his own glory, the evil of sin, and the good of the universe, when he punishes. It affords him no gratification to see any unhappy; and much less does it afford him any gratification to consign his creatures to everlasting misery, and doom them to *eternal death*. On the contrary, his language is—and it coincides with the benevolent feelings of his heart—Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: *wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.* Ezek. xviii. 31–32.

God here exhorts, commands, entreats men to *turn and live;* and the reason given is that

he has *no pleasure in their death.* This reason should be all-prevalent with us; for we should ever do what is well-pleasing in his sight. Our death can give him no pleasure; our life will redound to his glory and praise. Let us listen to his voice, for it is he who says, *Wherefore turn yourselves and live ye!*

This implies that men are in the way of death. On this is based the necessity of their turning in order to live. Why exhort men to turn and live, if their present course, persevered in, will not end in death and destruction? Such is the fact. They have only just to go on in the way they are,

"To reap immortal woe."

All men by nature, and while unrenewed, are in the way to ruin. This way is broad, because it embraces, in their unregenerate state, the whole family of man; but the way to heaven is narrow, because it embraces only those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus. Matt. vii. 13, 14; 2 Cor. v. 17. The gate at the head of the broad way is wide, for all men enter it by their natural birth; but the

gate at the entrance of the narrow way is strait, for only they enter therein who are born of the Spirit. The broad way requires no self-denial; it permits those who walk therein to gratify the corrupt propensities of their natures; it imposes no restraints; it tasks with no arduous duties. No wonder that men love this way, nor that it seems right unto them; for it coincides with the natural bent of their hearts—it lies in a parallel direction with all their inclinations. Yet still the *end* of this way is death; and indeed the *way* itself is death, for they who walk therein are dead in trespasses and sins. They are sinners, by nature and by practice vile; they are the servants of sin; they are under its dominion and its curse; it reigns over them with tyrant power. And the wages which they shall receive is death. This is the end of their course; this is the reward which they shall have for all their labours —eternal death! Why will ye die? Prov. xiv. 12; Eph. ii. 1–3; Rom. vi. 16–23; Ez. xviii. 31.

That men are in the way to death, may be

evinced with still greater distinctness by glancing at three important considerations:—

1. That men are sinners. This needs no proof. All acknowledge it. Rom. i. 18–32; iii. 9–20. And as sin separates from God, so the *natural* consequence of sin is an *eternal separation* from him; and this is also the *just*, and the *decreed*, result. Now as God is the fountain of happiness, and all our springs of enjoyment must issue from this fountain; so if sin be unforgiven, *eternal misery* is inevitable. Eternal misery is the natural, necessary, and unavoidable consequence of unrepented and unforgiven sin. As sinners, then, men are in the way to death. Their sins, unforgiven, will kill them beyond the tomb; and they will find that,

> "'Tis not the whole of life to live,
> Nor all of death to die!"

Sin bringeth forth death. Jas. i. 15. Its native and bitter fruit is ETERNAL DEATH.

2. Men have conscience. God has not left himself without witness in the human breast. This witness, though partaking of

the general corruption of our natures, yet preserves some little degree of faithfulness. Even in this world it does not fail to reprove, condemn, and censure for that which conflicts with its views of propriety. And in the future world, where it will be perfectly enlightened; where it will have clear views of right and wrong, according to the principles of eternal rectitude; where it can be under no inducement to decide erroneously, and where it will pass sentence upon every misdeed of time, and for every abused mercy and neglected privilege; its condemnations and reproaches must agonize the bosoms of the guilty and the lost. Now conscience will always exist; it is inseparable from ourselves—it is the mind itself passing sentence upon itself;—and as it reproves for transgression, it will ever render the sinner unhappy. It is the undying worm that shall for ever gnaw his heart. Mark ix. 44. A guilty conscience is "a bosom fury" to the lost sinner—"a living scorpion to his deathless soul." As long as he has a conscience he must be miserable; and that will

be for ever! So that, inevitably, he is in the way to ENDLESS DESPAIR!

3. God is not an indifferent spectator of human conduct. He takes notice of all that transpires; and he is angry with the wicked every day. Ps. vii. 11; ix. 17. So long as they are wicked, so long will he be angry with them; and that will be *for ever*, if they repent not and remain unforgiven. And,

> "There are no acts of pardon past
> In the cold grave to which we haste;
> But darkness, death, and long despair
> Reign in eternal silence there."

They who die in sin, are sinners for ever; they who die unforgiven, are unforgiven for ever; and God will punish them for ever. For he is *holy, just, and true.* He is holy, and hates sin; just, and will punish it; true, and will perform what he has threatened. Sin is abhorrent to his nature. He abominates it. Jer. xliv. 4. His hatred of sin he must and will express in the punishment of the impenitent and unbelieving. He will ex-

press, (in their punishment,) his abhorrence of their sins, and execute upon them the threatenings of his word. He hath said, The soul that sinneth, it shall die. Ez. xviii. 20. As he changes not, he will ever be holy, just, and true; sin will ever be his abhorrence; and so because of God's very nature, the sinner's course must end in death. As sure as God is unchangeable, death is the end of his way. While God remains holy, just, and true, the sinner must feel his wrath and be miserable,—and that will be for ever! He is in the way to death! Let him listen, then, to the voice of Jehovah when he says, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Wherefore turn yourselves and live ye. Ez. xxxiii. 11; xviii. 31, 32.

This suggests an alternative which demands not only thought, but action, instant action —viz. *Men must either turn or die!*

This follows from what precedes. If men

are in the way to death, as has been shown, then they must turn, or they must die. If they would not be swallowed up in the second death, it will not do for them to proceed in their present path. The farther they go, the greater their peril. Every succeeding step brings them nearer the awful end of the finally impenitent. The only way to shun that end is by turning unto the Lord. It is only by turning that they can hope to live. If they refuse, or neglect, to turn, they can but die. There is no remedy. Reader, if you do not turn, you must die! Wherefore turn and live!

This turning is not synonymous with regeneration. Regeneration, properly so called, is the work of God's Spirit. It is not our act; it is not a mere change of purpose; it is not a resolution to do right; it is not a change from one course of conduct to another. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit; and it precedes all right acts and exercises. Purposes, resolutions, reformations, so far as they are right, and all that is right in the

sight of God, are effects of regeneration, and not regeneration itself.

Regeneration according to the third chapter of John's gospel, is, *being born of the Spirit;* and surely that is *not our act:* it is the SPIRIT'S WORK. John iii. 1–8. HE takes away the heart of stone, and gives a heart of flesh; renews the will, and by his almighty power determines it to that which is good; and effectually draws the soul to Jesus Christ. Con. Faith, ch. 10, sec. 1. And so the answer to the thirty-first question of the Shorter Catechism,—"Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." It is the Spirit that quickens dead sinners. Eph. ii. 1. The power displayed in regeneration is like that by which Christ was raised from the dead. Eph. i. 18–21. It renews the heart, subdues the will, and sets it free from the bondage of corruption, changes the bent of the soul, and inclines the sinner

to forsake his sins and turn unto the Lord, and embrace Christ by faith, which he never would do without, and which, when thus renewed, he does freely and cheerfully. His turning is his own act, an effect—a fruit and an evidence—of his regeneration, begun as soon as he is born again, and so it cannot be separated from his new birth, though it is distinct from it. As soon as he is born again, he begins to live a new life, and this is seen in his turning from his sins unto God. Wherefore turn and live!

Men are dependent upon the Spirit of God for every good thing, for they cannot of themselves even think a good thought. Still, they have duties to perform, and as free moral agents they are to be urged to perform them; and every necessary provision is made for their weakness, helplessness, and dependence. No duty is enjoined but there is also grace promised for its performance: and to enforce the duty is but to present the privilege of seeking that grace. No plea of inability, therefore, can avail. Men must *do their duty*, or they must *die!* It is heaven's de-

cree; and it is irrevocable. The duty here enjoined is *turning to the Lord;* and it *must be done*, or the sinner *must perish!* Wherefore turn and live!

Look at this alternative—turn or die:—

It is a perfect alternative. It presents two opposite courses of conduct, with their results; and you cannot think of a third. It is, turn or die; and one of the two must be done. There is no escape. If you turn, you shall not die, but live; if you turn not, die you must. Can you think of a middle course? Can you think of a middle destiny—a state which is neither life nor death? Here, then, is the alternative. Bring it right before you; look it full in the face; and decide now, in the presence and fear of God, whether you will TURN or DIE!

For this alternative is urgent. You are now in the way to death. If cut off now, you are lost! And you know not how soon you may be summoned away. Time is flying along, and you are hastening to the judgment. In a little while your probation will be closed. Your life is "frail, short, and

uncertain." In a moment the brittle thread may be severed, and then you are gone—whither? By all the uncertainty which hangs over the future, are you urged to *turn* lest you *die!* On a single point your eternity is suspended. That point may be now! Now, therefore, should you turn; now flee from impending ruin and eternal wrath. Another moment it may be too late! Another call you may never have! Now is the accepted time; now the day of salvation. 2 Cor. vi. 2. Wherefore turn and live!

And let it be borne in mind that this alternative is reasonable. What is it that it requires? Just the forsaking of your sins, and turning from them unto the service of God; just ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. Isa. i. 16–18. And is it a great thing that God should require you to break off your iniquities? A great thing that he should demand your return to him from whom you have wandered? He has a right to you and to your services. He made you; he preserves you; he redeemed you—gave his Son to die for your sins—and what more

reasonable than that you should renounce your sins, put your trust in Jesus Christ, and live to his glory? Wherefore turn and live!

What God requires of you is reasonable. He cannot require less; and he will not! Never will he lower his demands; never modify the terms of his gospel. He has shown his love in the gift of his Son; he shows it daily in the gift of his Spirit, and the invitations and entreaties of his word—in his earnest expostulations. He has no pleasure in your death; and what he requires, that you may not die, is that you *turn unto him*—look to Jesus Christ and be saved. Your present course leads to certain death—death eternal; the only way you can avoid it is by turning from your evil ways and embracing Jesus Christ by faith.

On the other hand, if men will not turn, it is but reasonable that they should die; reasonable that they should reap the natural—the just and necessary—fruits of their own doings. Prov. i. 28–31; Gal. vi. 7, 8. The gospel-feast is spread, and the invitation given. Life and death are set before them.

Deut. xxx. 19. They are warned of their danger; they are instructed in the way of salvation; their duty is made plain; they are entreated to turn and live; and if they will not turn, why should they not die? Jehovah expostulates with them, saying, Why will ye die? and whom can they blame, if they perish, but themselves? self-destroyed, they must be self-condemned, and ever feel that their punishment is reasonable and right. Let this thought come home to yourself, reader: if you perish, there will be reason and justice in your punishment. Wherefore turn and live!

Such is the alternative, perfect, urgent, reasonable. But who will heed it? How often, reader, has it, in different forms, been presented to you! The Bible every where presents and enforces this alternative. It teaches that the only way to shun eternal death is turning from our evil ways. It places life and death before us, and exhorts us to choose life that we may live. Deut. xxx. 19, 20. He exhorts us to choose between the service of the true God and of

idols—between God and the world—repentance and perdition—faith and damnation—heaven and hell. It assures us that they who have the Son of God have life, and they that have not the Son of God have not life; and it also declares that they who believe shall have everlasting life; and they that believe not shall be damned; and that they who repent not shall perish. Josh. xxiv. 14, 15; Kings xviii. 21; Matt. vi. 24; Luke xiii. 3; Mark xvi. 16; 1 John v. 12; John iii. 36. These are the teachings of the word of God. Wherefore turn and live.

You are familiar with these truths. You are not unacquainted with the alternative, turn or die. And yet you turn not; you flee not from the way of death; you enter not into the path of life. Death is before you and yet you press on in your chosen way; death is before you, and yet you turn not. Turn or die, is written on every thing you see, and yet you turn not. Why this indifference? Are there no inducements to turn to the Lord? One would think that the death to which sinners are exposed would

constrain them to turn from their evil ways and flee for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. Heb. vi. 18. There is something terrific in the death that never dies; and the very obscurity which hangs around it, renders it the more fearful; and yet men can sport upon its brink, and seem to feel no alarm. When urged to flee, they listen not; they stop their ears to the calls of mercy; they regard not when God speaks; and they scarcely pause to think when he points them to the dreadful end of their course, and asks, Why will ye die?

The second death has no power to induce men to turn from their evil ways. The love of sin is stronger than the fear of death. Is there, then, no other motive which can be brought to operate on their minds? Yes, another is presented in this expostulation of Jehovah,—it is LIFE; wherefore turn yourselves, *and* LIVE *ye!*

Let us now take this view of the subject,—TURN AND LIVE! We have considered the alternative, *turn or die.* Let us now view it in this aspect, as an inducement to turn unto

the Lord, *turn and live.* The alternative, turn or die, shows what must be suffered, if men do not turn; this shows what they shall enjoy, if they do turn, they shall LIVE; wherefore turn and live.

But what is this life? It is not natural life. Repentance of sin and faith in Christ do not ensure freedom from death. All must die. The righteous do not live always here on earth. Though piety may have a tendency to lengthen out our days, yet the best men do not always live the longest. The reverse of this is often true. Hence the life here promised is not only nor chiefly natural or temporal life. It is not the life of the body in this world. It is something far nobler and better than this. Wherefore turn and live!

Nor does it mean the comforts and pleasures, the blessings and enjoyments of life. Religion does not always bring these with it. The righteous are often poor and afflicted, while the wicked live at ease and are blessed with an abundance of the good things of this world. Religion, however, sweetens the com-

forts and supports under the ills of life; and in this respect godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. 1 Tim. iv. 8. Still, earthly things are not the life here promised. It looks beyond the enjoyments of this world. It takes hold upon eternity. Heavenly in its origin, it tends to heaven again.

It is spiritual life. When one turns unto God, he begins to live. He is quickened, made alive, and he begins a new existence. Eph. ii. 1–3. Dead before, he now *hears* the voice of the Son of God, and *lives*. John v. 25. He is born again; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new; he is a new man, a new creature. John iii. 1–8; 2 Cor. v. 17. A principle of new life is implanted in his heart, and he begins to live anew. Hitherto he has been dead, now he is alive—just born into the kingdom, a new man in a new world! He is united to Christ by faith, and he lives by the faith of the Son of God. Gal. ii. 20. Faith is the new principle of the new life. Being justified by faith he has peace with God. Rom. v. 1.

He is reconciled and at peace with his Maker. He has communion and fellowship with him; he enjoys his presence, rejoices in his smiles, and feels that his favour is life. Ps. xxx. 5. His pleasures now are of a spiritual nature; and he seeks his happiness in the service and enjoyment of God. This life is the fruit of God's quickening Spirit; it is derived from God, and it tends to God. From him is its origin; from him comes its aliment, its support and nourishment. It is life to God and life to holiness; it is life to Christ and to the Holy Spirit; it is life to happiness and life to hope. It imparts peace and joy here; and it holds up the prospect of eternal rest hereafter, for it gives a title to mansions in the skies; it is connected with the bliss of heaven, for where it exists, it shall never die, but be swallowed up in the full fruition of eternal glory. He that believeth hath everlasting life. John iii. 36. Turn and live!

Hence this life leads to and ends in eternal life. This is the life chiefly intended, as eternal death is the death intended when it is

asked, *Why will ye die?* Eternal life is more than endless existence; it is an endless blessed and happy existence; it is eternal happiness —happiness in the presence of God, pure, perfect, and ever increasing! It is heaven! This one word includes it all. It is vain to attempt a description of the happiness of heaven; for the mind of man can form no adequate conception of it, until it is reached and tasted by happy experience. We can no more describe the happiness of heaven than we can heaven itself. It is enough to know that it is what God, who is infinite in resources, as well as in wisdom, love, and goodness, has provided for them that love him; enough to know that it is all that man or angel can desire, and that it is to continue, not only for a few days or years, but for ever! Eternal life is to be for ever with the Lord! Man was made to glorify God, and to be happy in the enjoyment of him; and the happiness of heaven is that for which man was made; it meets the cravings of the immortal mind—it fills the soul—and fills it for ever! Heaven was made for man, and man

for heaven! Eternal life is his birthright. He has forfeited it by sin; but renewed by the Holy Ghost, and made spiritually alive, he is fitted for eternal life, and that shall be his portion. They who are made spiritually alive here, shall have eternal life in heaven. He who gives *grace* will also give *glory*. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Wherefore turn and live!

Eternal life is the perpetuation of spiritual life. In this sense they who live shall never die. John xi. 25, 26. Eternal life! Such is the life promised—the converse of the death threatened. It is eternal life—eternal blessedness in heaven! Look at it; think of it; and is it no inducement to turn from your evil ways? Is sin, with death as its completion, more attractive than holiness, with heaven as its reward? If the fear of death drive you not from the way of transgressors, shall not the love of life—the desire of eternal happiness—allure you from that way? Will you not listen to the voice of God when he says, TURN AND LIVE? He delights not in your death. He has given his Son to

deem you; he has sent his Spirit to renew and sanctify you; he has pleaded long with you by his word, his servants, his providence, his Spirit; he has used warnings, threatenings, invitations, expostulations, entreaties; and when every argument fails, and you seem determined on destruction, he cries after you, Why wilt thou die? Turn and live!

Now shall the motive which God here presents to your mind induce you to turn? It is life—spiritual life here—eternal life hereafter. Eternal life! In view of it, will you turn from your evil ways unto the Lord? Will you embrace Jesus Christ by faith? Reader, will you *turn and live?* If not, we come back to the alternative, you must *turn or die!*

My aged reader, I ask you, why not *turn and live?* Your dying hour is near; soon it will be too late to turn; it is now full late; why not now turn and live?

Middle aged reader, I ask you, why not *turn and live?* You have gone far enough in the way of death; God now invites you to return;

he presses upon you the invitation; and why not turn and live?

Youthful reader, why will not you *turn and live?* Are you in love with death? You must turn or die; the work will never be easier; the difficulties will never be less; your duty never plainer; the calls of God never more clear; then why not turn and live?

"Sinners, turn, why will ye die?
God your Maker asks you why,
God who did your being give,
Made you with himself to live,
He the fatal cause demands,
Asks the work of his own hands;
Why, ye thankless creatures, why,
Will ye cross his love and die?

"Sinners, turn, why will ye die?
God your Saviour asks you why;
He who did your soul retrieve,
Died himself that you might live,
Will ye let him die in vain,
Crucify your Lord again?
Why, ye rebel sinners, why
Will ye slight his grace and die?

"Sinners, turn why will ye die?
God the Spirit asks you why;
Many a time with you he strove,
Wooed you to embrace his love;
Will ye not his grace receive?
Will ye still refuse to live?
Why will ye for ever die,
O ye guilty sinners, why?"

CHAPTER III.

THE SINNER'S FRIEND.

A friend of publicans and sinners.—Matt. xi. 19.

THE Jews of our Saviour's time were so far departed from God that they seemed disposed not to be pleased with any thing which he had done, or should do, for their salvation. He had done much for them and their fathers; but they were always a rebellious house. Thus in the time of Jeremiah the Lord said, This thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and

not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Jer. vii. 23–26. They would not hear the servants of God, and when he sent his Son, they would not receive him. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. John i. 10, 11. This conduct of the Jews in rejecting the servants and the Son of God, is illustrated by the Saviour in one of his instructive parables:

There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and

beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him,—and in so saying pass sentence upon themselves,—He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their season. To show them that they had pronounced their own doom, Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and

given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. Matt. xxi. 33–44.

In the eleventh chapter of Matthew, the Saviour gives us another illustration of the same trait in the Jewish character. They were like peevish and fretful children, displeased with every thing. John the Baptist they did not like because he was too austere; and Jesus Christ they censured because they thought him too social, too much disposed to mingle in society. Hence Jesus said, But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But, he adds, though they

were displeased, but wisdom is justified of her children. Matt. xi. 16–19.

The publicans were collectors of taxes, under the Romans. These taxes were not paid willingly by the Jews, and the publicans were aided by the military in their work. So reluctant were the Jews to pay their taxes—taxes imposed by the Romans,—and so great were the oppressions and cruelties enacted in collecting them, that none but the baser sort coveted the occupation of a publican. For the most part they were "from the lowest ranks of society and were detested by every body." In the Jewish vocabulary the term, *publican*, was descriptive of the most base and abandoned character; and by the terms, *publicans and sinners*, are represented the vile, the base and the abandoned—the chief of sinners. When they spake of Jesus as a friend of publicans and sinners, they intended to represent him as being too familiar with the vicious and corrupt, associating with them too freely, and giving them his countenance in their vices. Hence when there drew near unto him all

the publicans and sinners for to hear him, the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. Luke xv. 1, 2. And on another occasion they said, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. Luke xix. 7. Their language, therefore, when they styled Jesus a friend of publicans and sinners, is the language of reproach; and in the sense they intended, it is most false and calumnious. But what they intended as a reproach, may be so construed as to be the glory of our Redeemer. In the sense they intended, he was not a friend of publicans and sinners; but in a most interesting and important sense, he is the sinner's Friend. Let us so contemplate his character.

We are sinners. Our character, while unregenerate, as to any moral excellence or spiritual good, is as odious in the sight of God, as any thing which the Jews could intend to express by the terms, publicans and sinners.

We have sinned against clearer light than the publicans and sinners of our Saviour's

time; for God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. Heb. i. 1, 2. And not only hath God spoken by his Son, but beside this, we live under the dispensation of the Spirit. We have enjoyed and resisted his reproofs; and therefore we are sinners above many. We are sinners, great sinners, the chief of sinners!

This is the character given us in the Bible. Almost every where on the sacred pages we read the proofs of human depravity. We read them in the descriptions here given of human character. We read them in the habitual course of the bad, and in the occasional falls of the good. We read them in the sacrificial rites of the Jewish economy, in the Saviour's agony in the garden, and his groans upon the cross. We read them in the prayers and confessions of the saints, and in the promises and threatenings of God. The whole Bible testifies to the depravity of man.

The Saviour taught his disciples to pray

daily for the forgiveness of sins. Matt. vi. 9–13; Luke xi. 4. He declared that he shed his blood for the remission of sins; and one of his apostles asserts that his blood cleanseth from all sin. Matt. xxvi. 28; 1 John i. 7. Then we need forgiveness; then we have sins to be remitted; we have sins from which we need to be cleansed. And the Bible declares that there is no man which doeth good constantly and sinneth not. 2 Chron. vi. 36; Psa. xiv. 2; Prov. xx. 9. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. Gal. iii. 22. As is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in

their ways: and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, *and all the world* may become guilty before God. Rom. iii. 9–20. The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually. Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21; Rom. i. 18–32.

What the Bible thus plainly and fully declares, is also taught us and confirmed by facts. The facts of history are facts written in blood,and could be true of none but fallen and depraved beings. What the Bible declares in Psa. lviii. 3–5, we see exhibited in the life around us:—The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. We speak of the innocence of infancy and childhood; but

at how early a period are unholy passions manifested! How soon we see the workings of anger, and pride, and dissimulation! And as our children grow up, how prone are they to fall into evil practices and habits! What care must the parent exercise, and what anxiety must he feel, and what effort must he make, lest his children grow up in the way they should not! Why this proneness to every thing evil, if the heart be right? Why so prone to go astray, if the nature be not corrupt and inclined to evil? Ah, that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and the sinner must be born again. John iii. 1–8. Yes, reader, *you* are a *sinner;* and you must be born again!

We live in the midst of gospel light, under just and equal laws, and education pours her concentrated rays upon us; and yet look at the facts which the papers of almost every week disclose:—the daring robberies, the extensive frauds, the horrid murders; and in view of these can you doubt whether man is a sinner? It would seem that God is permitting these awful and multiplied exhibitions of

human depravity on purpose to convince all of the desperate wickedness of the human heart, and to show beyond all lingering of doubt, that nothing short of the religion of Jesus Christ can exert a reforming and controlling influence over the race of man. Education is not sufficient; law is not sufficient; civilization and the restraints of society are not sufficient. You may erect a college in every town, and have a school in every family; and you may place a prison in every neighbourhood, and a gallows at every cross-road; and you may enact laws, and introduce all the refinements of civilized life; and yet the wicked will do wickedly until their hearts are renewed by the Spirit of God, and they are brought under the influence of the religion of his Son. And if to the facts which are made public, you could take one full view of the secret wickedness which is concealed from mortal vision, you would stand horror-struck, and wonder that the bolts of divine wrath are not dashed upon a guilty world! Apart from what is concealed, there is

enough in the daily disclosures of crime to convince any one that man is a sinner.

What we are thus taught in the Bible and by facts, we feel in ourselves to be true. We are sensible of our failings. We know, we feel, that we are sinners. Not one of my readers but is conscious of unworthiness and ill-desert. Not one but feels that the law has claims which have not been met. A sense of guilt, at times at least, is present in every heart. Conscience, reader, your own conscience, is a witness against you. Your heart condemns you; and if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. 1 John iii. 20.

Now as sinners we have need of a friend. When man was created, God was his friend; but by our sins we have made him our enemy. He is angry with us every day, because we are wicked, because we are sinners. Psa. vii. 11. It is as true of us as it was of the Jews. They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. Isa. lxiii. 10. We are in love with the world; and it is written,

Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Jas. iv. 4. And it is also written, The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Rom. viii. 7. And in the sermon on the mount we have this instruction from the best teacher, Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Matt. v. 25. We have offended God, and are urged to become reconciled to him. They who offend human rulers, or break human laws, need a friend and advocate near the throne, or before the tribunals of their country, to manage their case and plead their cause. We have offended our Creator and Governor, and broken his laws. On account of our transgressions he is our adversary, and with him we should agree quickly; but is there any Advocate for us? Is there a friend to

whom we can commit our cause? We need a friend; is there a friend for us?

Yes, there is a Friend and Advocate; for Jesus Christ is the Friend of sinners! He is the sinner's Friend, the sinner's Advocate. He is ready to undertake our case and to plead our cause. For if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John ii. 1. He is the Mediator between God and men. 1 Tim. ii. 5. He has shown his friendship to us in numerous ways—in ways the most wonderful and astonishing.

He gave a wonderful exhibition of his friendship in assuming our nature. By this act he took upon him the form of a servant; he took part of the flesh and blood; he became like one of us—a brother—hence called the Son of man. Phil. ii. 7; Heb. ii. 14; Rom. viii. 3; Heb. ii. 11; John v. 26, 27. He relinquished the glories of heaven; he emptied himself, and made himself of no reputation; "he wrapped the veil of humanity about him, but the God was within;" God manifest in the flesh. The

word was made flesh. This was a wonderful stoop of love. It demonstrates Jesus to be the sinner's Friend. John xvii. 5; Phil. ii. 5–8; 1 Tim. iii.16; John i. 14; Matt. xi. 19.

And while in the flesh, he made a constant exhibition of his friendship. His life was spent in going about doing good. Acts x. 38. Benevolence shone in all his actions. His miracles were not performed as a mere exhibition of power; they all had some beneficial design. His instructions were not intended as a mere display of wisdom; they are all adapted to promote the best good of men. And it was among the poor and the guilty that he laboured, and for them that he toiled, insomuch that his enemies called him *a friend of publicans and sinners.* And his benevolent life and labours were not free from suffering, for he had not where to lay his head. Matt. xi. 19; viii. 20. He was calumniated and persecuted; yet he continued to work for the good of men, and to give a practical proof of his friendship for sinners—his desire for their salvation—for he said, The Son of man came not to be ministered

unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Matt. xx. 28.

Hence in his death he showed his friendship for us. He said, Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. John xv. 13. This love he has had for us; this costly exhibition of his friendship has he given. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. v. 6–10. And in dying for us, he proved himself our Friend.

And then Christ arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and there he intercedes before his Father's throne. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. Heb. ix. 24. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he

ever liveth to make intercession for them. Heb. vii. 25. He is the sinner's Advocate in heaven.

And more than this, he shows his friendship in the offers he makes of himself and his salvation to all who hear the gospel. These offers include himself and his benefits; and they are made without restriction, or limitation; they are full and free, and unrestricted. He says, Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. Isa. xlv. 22. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Isa. lv. 1. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Rev. xxii. 17. And, reader, these offers and invitations are to you, just as much as if you were the only sinner in the world! Jesus Christ invites YOU to come to him; and he offers to be your Advocate and your Friend.

There is no reason, then, to doubt the friendship of Jesus Christ towards a sinful

world. He has given so many unquestionable evidences of it, that none can with any reason doubt it. He is, beyond all controversy, the Friend of sinners.

But what kind of Friend is he? A friend of publicans and sinners; not a friend to their sins, but to their souls—a friend who saves his people, and all who trust in him, from their sins. Matt. i. 21.

He is a divine Friend. In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Col. ii. 9. Christ is over all, God blessed for ever—the true God, and eternal life. Rom. ix. 5; 1 John v. 20. Hence he is able to sustain and relieve—able to perform every needful act of friendship.

And he is a human Friend as well as divine, man as well as God. Hence he is acquainted with all our weaknesses and infirmities, and he can sympathize with us in our fears and our sorrows; for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. Ps. ciii. 13, 14. Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that

through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Heb. ii. 14. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Heb. iv. 14, 15. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. Heb. ii. 17, 18. As man, made like unto his brethren, he is able to succour, because he can sympathize, feel for us, and feel with us.

And he is an affectionate Friend. He wept at the grave of Lazarus; and then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! John xi. 35, 36. On one occassion he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said,

Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. Matt. xii. 49, 50. On the cross we see a moving exhibition of the Saviour's affectionate spirit: There stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother. And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. John xix. 25–27. And Jesus is the same affectionate Saviour now, the same affectionate Friend. He loves them that love him. Of him it is written, Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. John xiii. 1. And he said, He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. And again, If a

man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. John xiv. 21–23.

Jesus is also a tried Friend. His chosen disciples were slow to learn; their imperfections tried his patience and his love, and yet he loved them even unto the end. John xiii. 1. Though unworthy he called them friends; and he loved them even unto death. Yea, he loved them in death, and through death, and beyond death. He laid down his life for them; his love was stronger than death. John xv. 12–17. Cant. viii. 6.

"One there is above all others
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end.
Which of all our friends to save us,
Could or would have shed his blood?
But this Saviour died to have us
Reconciled in him to God."

He is a faithful Friend. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Prov.

xviii. 24. Such a friend is Jesus Christ. Earthly friends sometimes deceive and desert us in the time of greatest need; but this friend is ever near in trouble, faithful and constant. He is truly "a friend in need," and therefore, "a friend indeed." For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. Heb. xiii. 5. No one trusting in him has found him unfaithful.

And he is an almighty Friend. He has all power in heaven and in earth. Matt. xxviii. 18. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. John i. 3. He is before all things, and by him all things consist. Col. i. 17. He upholds all things by the word of his power. Heb. i. 3. Now he who made and governs all things, must be Almighty—the mighty God. Isa. ix. 6. None, therefore, can pluck his friends out of his hands. John x. 27–30. They shall never perish. Mighty to save, he is able to do for us all the good we need, to protect and defend us from all the evils that may threaten us, and to sustain

us under all the trials with which we may meet. Isa. lxiii. 1.

Therefore he is just the Friend we need. His atonement and intercession can prevail for us before his Father's throne. He can deliver us from condemnation; he can free us from the guilt, the pollution, and the power of sin. We have seen that, *as sinners*, we need a friend, one who can reconcile us to God, one who can restore us to the favour of our offended and injured Sovereign. This Jesus Christ can do; for he is our peace, having made peace through the blood of his cross. Eph. ii. 14. Col. i. 20.

But how may we secure his friendship? How may he become our friend? How may we obtain an interest in the Friend of sinners? How may we, personally, be enabled to rejoice in the friendship of Jesus Christ?

In the first place you must feel your need of him. They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Matt. ix. 12. They who think themselves well will not call the physician's aid, though a deadly disease may be preying upon them. So if we are

not alive to our sinfulness, we shall not be in earnest to obtain the friendship of Jesus. But we are sinners. This has been proved. Our duties to God and to each other have not been done. We are guilty and perishing. This we should deeply feel and sincerely confess. This is the first step toward friendship with Jesus Christ.

And, then, in the next place, feeling our need of him, we are to see in him a suitableness to our case, an adaptation to our wants and necessities. What has been said of our sinfulness, shows us the friend we need; what has been said of Jesus Christ as the friend of sinners, shows us his suitableness to our wants.

And, in the third place, we are to receive him as he is offered to us in the Gospel. He is offered to us *freely;* and thus we are to receive him. He is offered to us *as our Saviour;* as such we are to receive him, in all his offices, as our prophet, our priest, and our king. He is offered to us *as our Mediator;* as such we must receive him, and commit our cause to him. He is offered to

us *as our Friend;* as such we must receive him, and desire above every thing, an interest in his friendship. John i. 12–13.

And then, in the fourth place, we must confide in him, trust in him with humble and affectionate confidence; we must believe in him, receive and rest upon him. He loves to be trusted; and we must trust him with our immortal interests. We must commit our souls to him as unto a faithful Creator and Saviour, a true and tried Friend. 1 Pet. iv. 19. Realizing our helplessness and our vileness, we must cast ourselves upon his arms, and be willing—not to be damned, but to be saved by him—be willing that he should dispose of us and of our eternal concerns as may seem good in his sight.

And we must repent of our sins and forsake them. Not in our sins can we hope for peace with God. Sin must be repented of, and it must be forsaken, and to Jesus must we look for its remission. His blood cleanseth from all sin; and he will look to such as are of a broken heart—poor and of a contrite spirit, and that tremble at his word. 1 John

i. 7; Isa. lvii. 15; lxi. 1; lxvi. 2. He invites the labouring and the heavy laden to come unto him, and he promises to them rest. Matt. xi. 28–30. Thus should we come, and say,

> "Here, Lord, I give myself away;
> 'Tis all that I can do."

And by prayer we must look for his Spirit and grace. We need his aid. We are weak, and feeling our weakness, we must look to him who is Almighty for strength. We are ignorant, and sensible of our blindness and folly, we should look to him who is wise for that wisdom which cometh from above. Jas. iii. 15–18. For whatever we feel that we need, we are to ask, that we may receive. Matt. vii. 7–11. We need the friendship of Jesus Christ; let us ask, that we may receive. We need peace with God; let us seek for it in prayer. We need pardon; let us ask God to forgive. We need to be born again; let us ask of God who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. Jas. i. 5. There is a throne of grace; let us go to it, that we may obtain

mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Heb. iv. 16. God does not bless us for our prayers, but in the way of prayer; it is an appointed means of grace. Of Saul it was said, Behold, he prayeth. Acts ix. 11. It is at the mercy-seat that we shall find Jesus our Friend. It is by penitent, believing prayer, that we shall obtain the help of the Spirit and an interest in Jesus Christ, the Friend of sinners. Not that our prayers have any worth—not that they commend us to God—but God blesses those who seek his blessing; and to seek by prayer and supplication, is to put ourselves in the way of obtaining his favour. We must ask, if we would receive; we must seek, if we would find. Reader, *do you pray?* If you refuse, can you hope that Jesus will be your Friend? And without his friendship, what are you?

That there is such a Friend as Jesus, the Friend of sinners, is a comfort to the afflicted. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Isa. liii. 3. He knows how to pity the afflicted, and he can succour them; he can sustain and comfort them. To him it is

their privilege to go in their sorrows, seek his friendship, and ask his support.

And here is encouragement to the anxious and enquiring. They feel their sinfulness, and realize that God is justly offended with them. They feel themselves perishing, and they ask with earnestness, What must we do to be saved? We point them to Jesus, the sinner's Friend, and say, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! Acts xvi. 29–31; John i. 29. And we say to them, Go to Jesus; go just as you are; go now! Do not delay with the vain hope of making yourselves better, for that you can never do! Go at once to the Physician, that he may cleanse you from your sins, and heal the malady of your souls! Are you sinners? He is the Friend of sinners. Are you great sinners? He came into the world to save such, to save sinners, even the chief of sinners. 1 Tim. i. 15. Is he not able to save you? Can you doubt his ability? Is he not willing to save you? Can you doubt his willingness? But see what he has done and suffered that he might save you;

and when he has done so much, and when by his Spirit he is convincing you of sin, and giving you to feel your need of him; and when you look to him, and beseech him to have mercy upon you, and forgive and save you, do you think he will reject you? When he says he will in no wise cast you out, will you disbelieve him? John vi. 37. O beware of unbelief! Receive the Saviour, accept of him, rely upon him, believe in him; and thus secure his favour and his love—his everlasting friendship.

Let all now make Jesus Christ their friend by giving themselves to him. Let the young do this, for they must die, and they should remember now their Creator in the days of their youth. Eccl. xii. 1. Let the aged do this, for they are soon to stand before God in judgment. Jesus is the friend of all who come to him—of all who trust in him. He is the best FRIEND of his friends; and he is the most dreadful ENEMY of his enemies! He will say, Come, ye blessed; and he will also say, Depart, ye cursed!! Matt. xxv.

And now, reader, why will you die? Turn and live! Secure the favor of the sinner's Friend, and be at peace with God. Destroy not yourself. Make one honest effort for the salvation of your soul. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Luke xiii. 23–29. Listen to the calls of mercy; yield to the strivings of the Spirit; embrace Jesus Christ by faith, and regard the expostulations of Jehovah:—As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel! Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. Ezek. xviii. 30–32; Isa. i. 18; lv. 1–4.

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